

What Hunters Should Know About Avian Influenza

Bird hunters should be aware of an avian influenza, or bird flu, that is spreading among wild bird populations around the world. Scientists identify this influenza virus as H5N1. They believe migrating birds will bring the virus to wild bird populations in the North American continent sometime in the next year.

Birds can be infected by many viruses, but most are not harmful to people. The H5N1 virus, however, is a concern for it infects birds and can also cause serious illness among people. So far, almost 200 people worldwide have been infected with the bird flu, with almost half these dying from illnesses related to the infection.



None of the people infected with the bird flu caught the virus from wild birds; they all were related to handling domestic poultry that were infected. But wild birds can carry this deadly flu virus, so it is important to take precautions while hunting and cleaning wild birds.

Q: How can I protect myself from potential bird diseases while hunting?

A: The following suggestions are common sense precautions that hunters should follow normally when hunting:

1. Do not handle birds that are obviously sick or birds found dead.
2. Keep your game birds cool, clean, and dry.
3. Wash your hands as soon as possible after handling birds, carry cleansing hand soap or alcohol wipes so you can clean your hands immediately after hunting.
4. Use rubber gloves when cleaning all wild game.
5. Do not eat, drink, or smoke while cleaning your birds.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water or alcohol wipes after dressing birds.
6. Clean all tools and surfaces immediately afterward; use hot soapy water, then disinfect with a 10% chlorine bleach solution.

Q: Is it safe to eat wild birds?

A: Eating all poultry is safe as long as the bird is thoroughly cooked to 165 degrees. This will kill any virus present. Please be careful of smoking wild birds, if smoking temperatures do not heat the meat to 165 degrees, it may not be safe to eat.

Q: How can I tell if a bird I shot has bird flu?

A: You cannot tell if a bird was infected with bird flu. Because of this, take precautions by cleaning your hands after handling or cleaning all birds. If a bird appeared to be sick, do not handle the bird.

Q: What is the government doing to monitor the spread of the H5N1 virus in wild birds?

A: Most scientists believe the spread of avian influenza in wild birds will occur through migrating bird flyways. In the United States, this could begin in the Alaskan flyways because both Asian and North American birds use Alaskan habitat for nesting and breeding in the spring and summer. Both live and dead wild birds are being tested to detect any presence of the H5N1 bird flu virus in Alaska. When the virus is detected in Alaska, testing of birds will expand to the lower 48 states.

Plans are also being made for environmental sampling of waterways across the United States. There also are plans for hunter check stations for bird hunters that will test birds that hunters have killed. Please cooperate with any game bird check stations in your area.

Q: Can mosquitoes spread bird flu?

A: No, mosquitoes do not spread bird flu, but they do spread other diseases such as West Nile virus. Avoid mosquito bites while hunting by wearing repellent or protective clothing when mosquitoes are active.

For additional information on working with or handling wild birds, the U.S. Geological Survey has helpful information at:

http://www.nwhc.usgs.gov/publications/wildlife_health_bulletins/WHB_05_03.jsp

